

Human Kindness Foundation

a little good news

Spring 1999

DEEP & SIMPLE — A NEW BOOK BY BO!



EDITORS' NOTE: This newsletter is being produced by the rest of the HKF family, because Bo is in a writing retreat, working on a book to be published by Viking/Penguin early next year. But our own latest book of Bo's writings, *Deep & Simple: A Spiritual Path for Modern Times*, has just arrived from the printer and is now available (*see order form on last page of this newsletter*). This is his first new book in almost ten years. The following three pages are excerpted from *Deep & Simple*.

From the Introduction, "A Threefold Path":

Deep and simple. That's the razor's edge. We can easily be deep but not simple, brooding over the mysteries of life or over our own problems, emitting a serious, heavy presence as though we carry the weight of the world on our shoulders. This is a path of struggle and confusion. Or we can fall into being simple but not deep, like many "new-age" followers, who naively believe that by keeping their minds solely on positive thoughts, they will attune themselves to never-ceasing abundance, never-ending health and life, good times and happiness. Despite all its slogans and cheerleading, this is a path of fear and denial.

Being deep *and* simple is a very graceful balance which requires no less than all of our commitment, attention, and persistence. This is the path of the sages. This is the balance you and I can study and practice every moment of our lives, no matter what circumstances or environments we must face.

Long ago, I noticed three practical tips for deep and simple living which every great tradition seemed to hold in common: simplicity, service, and practice. By simplicity, I mean that we are advised to live modestly and not get too caught up in luxury or possessions, not to waste our divine energy on too much worldliness. By service, I mean that we are encouraged to devote ourselves to the common good rather than merely self-centered success. By practice, I mean we are reminded that reading and thinking are not enough; the sages and saints have left behind daily practices which gradually bring about a profound awakening.

This book is organized along those threefold lines, although of course they can never be fully separated: Simple living is a great service to the world's ecology; service is among the greatest spiritual practices; and personal practice leads to the kind of transformation which serves and inspires many others. So, the divisions in this book are merely conveniences that hopefully will be useful but not limiting.

I have great affection for the world's religious scriptures, and I believe with all my heart that they share more similarities than differences. None of them would find fault with a lifestyle of simplicity, service and practice. None would find fault with the term "deep and simple." According to the world's great scriptures, the meaning of life is deep and the rules of life are simple. An interfaith way to say it is: Everything counts, so be kind. *Everything counts* — a reminder to the intellect that life is deeper than it may seem; *be kind* — a simple instruction for the heart. You can't be a good Christian or Muslim or Hindu or Buddhist or Jew or a good anything else until you understand such universal truths as these.

I hope you are able to use this book as a friendly interfaith resource which does not compete or conflict with your religious views, but rather enriches and enlivens your beliefs and helps you to apply them even more effectively in your everyday life. The Holy Ones promise us that we can become radiantly alive, unafraid, shining beacons of goodness and faith. You and I may look within and find that very hard to believe. Yet we do believe, even if we stubbornly pretend that we don't. We hold the divine spark in our hearts, and we are aching to let it become a blazing fire which consumes all our foolishness and despair. This ongoing challenge is the human spiritual journey we all share.

DEEP & SIMPLE by Bo Lozoff

excerpt: When Everything Goes Wrong

If we take even a brief look at the history of the great world religions, it becomes clear that every genuine spiritual path has more to do with our response to things going wrong than with our problems being magically corrected. **Faith is a profound acceptance of life's Ultimate Goodness no matter what happens.** It's a willingness on our part to accept *any* immediate situation — execution, cancer, loss, betrayal — as part of God's Power and Grace and Love for us.

God's Power designs and creates unlimited possibilities; *our* power is to bring the best of those possibilities to life in the world instead of the worst.

Look around at the world. People ask, "Why does God allow children to starve? Why does God allow innocent people to be murdered? Why does God allow so many wars?" But God has merely created all possibilities, including the elements necessary for a miserable world or a wonderful world. We have the free will to use those elements in a way which will bring more peace or more suffering. That's our choice, yours and mine, all the time.

We continue to choose anger over Love, fear over Love, national boundaries over Love, greed over Love, race over Love, self-protection over Love. God has given us free will so that we can make such choices. If we don't like the way the world is going, then we can begin to choose differently right now. Today.

excerpt: Living In Tune With Our Beliefs

My Guru, Neem Karoli Baba, used to say, "Life is really very simple; you just keep making it complicated." One clear example of that is the connection between our deepest beliefs and the way we live our everyday life. It's so simple — if our actions are in tune with our values, we'll feel good about ourselves and life will work as smoothly as it can. If we act contrary to what we believe in, we will gradually grow to hate ourselves, and life will be a constant and unfriendly struggle.

There is a term for the gap that exists between our deepest beliefs and our daily behavior — it's called self-hatred.

If my heart believes it's wrong to steal, then in order to let myself steal something, I may close off a little part of the way I receive messages from my heart. If I believe in kindness, then in order to be cruel, I may close off another little part of my heart. If I believe in courage, then cowardice may close off another little part of my heart. And so it goes. If I don't know what I believe, then every day I'm probably closing off at least a few more parts of my heart by doing things that are easiest or selfish instead of what I may think is *right*.

By the time we're adults, we've closed off our hearts in so many ways, it's like a garden hose that's all kinked up, and the Water Of Life is hardly able to drip its way through. We lose all respect for ourselves because we

don't feel our wonderful hearts, and eventually we become extremely stuck in self-hatred. We lose hope in real joy or happiness, and assume we have to settle for damage control and barely "getting by."

Does that sound familiar? Most of us pass through such a "dark night of the soul" at least once or twice; the trick is not to get stuck in it for our whole lives.

excerpt: We Need You!

Don't wait until you can get to Africa or India to begin being of service. Start now. Pitch in to help make your community a better place, even if your community is a prison. I often hear about wonderful service projects happening behind bars, from formal programs, like reading books onto tape for the blind or making quilts for AIDS babies, to inmates who are just trying to make their cellblock a kinder place to live. *[Two more such projects are described on the "Good Works" page of this newsletter.]*

Our friend Tom Dodson is doing time at the Ellis Unit in Huntsville, Texas. Disheartened by the thefts in his cellblock, Tall Tom (as he's known) posted this sign:

ATTENTION

THERE IS A CELL THIEF ON THIS TANK!!!

I find the behavior of stealing from other men on D-12 to be unacceptable. I publicly proclaim my dissatisfaction with this behavior.

I hereby commit myself to working toward a non-violent solution to this situation.

I encourage anyone who has similar feelings to join in a moment of silence at 5:45 AM. You are encouraged to approach this period of silent contemplation with a feeling of peacefulness and community unity toward all men on D-12. Your support in this effort is appreciated.

Underneath, Tall Tom left a place for signatures, and nine other men signed on. He wrote us again to say that from the time he posted the sign, there's been no stealing reported in his tank. He says he'll never know how many men participated in the silent meditation, but the sign obviously had an effect on lots of the guys.

This is a solid beginning of community organizing. There is *always* an opportunity to be of service. And prisons especially need your kindness and helpfulness, don't they? You may not want to be there, but millions of people in the "free world" also live in dangerous, ugly places where they would rather not be. That doesn't mean you can avoid doing your part.

PRACTICE: SACRED READING (taken from *Deep & Simple*)

Throughout the time Josh was growing up, our primary spiritual practice together as a family was Sacred Reading. The first thing Sita, Josh and I did each morning was to gather together for a fifteen- or twenty-minute reading from a holy book.

In this way, over a period of seventeen or eighteen years, we were able to draw deep inspiration from sacred teachings such as the Bible, the Hindu *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, Buddhist stories, Native American tales and others. It was a wonderful way to begin each day, reminding ourselves of the biggest truths before the day's busy details began.

The Practice

With a Group: In a family or community, set time aside for daily readings. Mornings usually work best, before family or community members split off for the day. Morning readings also allow you to work with the message of the readings throughout the day.

If you'll be taking turns reading, give each person at least a week at a time, if not more, so he or she has the chance to choose longer readings and break them up over several days. Stories are often more enjoyable to read aloud than straight scripture or didactic teachings, and most good spiritual stories appeal to all ages.

By Yourself: It's really the same practice, except you'll be reading to yourself, and usually not out loud (although it's sometimes effective to read aloud even when you are alone. That's how I write my books and newsletters). Alone, you'll have the luxury of going as slowly as you like, taking time for the reading to sink in.

Even if you can't do daily readings "together" with your friends or family, you can still do this practice long-distance with loved ones in other places. After Josh left home, he continued to read from *The Ramayana* and so did we, and we discussed it in phone calls and letters.

A Few Tips:

- Because our attention span has been under assault since the invention of television, we may not be in the habit of reading very slowly or reflectively. With this practice, remember that quantity is unimportant compared to what you receive from it. Classic spiritual stories, especially, are meant to be studied over and over again for a whole lifetime. As we deepen through our practices, we gain more from the same teachings each time through.
- Don't assume that the reading must hit you over the head with a blatant moral or message. Our daily life has countless subtleties, and so do holy readings. Children especially do not have to be told what it all "means." Let them hear whatever they can hear. Have faith that all genuine spiritual readings have many levels of meaning.

There were two old monks who had lived together for many years, and they never quarreled.

Now one of them said, "Let us try to quarrel once just like other people do."

And the other replied, "I don't know how a quarrel happens."

Then the first said, "Look, I put a brick between us, and I say, 'This is mine,' and you say, 'No, it's mine,' and after that a quarrel begins."

So they placed a brick between them, and one of them said, "This is mine," and the other said "No, it's mine."

And he replied, "Indeed, it's all yours, so take it with you!"

And they went away unable to fight with each other.

Desert Fathers



SEEKING PEACE by Johann Christoph Arnold

[ANOTHER EDITOR'S NOTE: We have been so deeply moved by Arnold's book, Seeking Peace, that we have helped fund a printing of it in paperback so we can send free copies to prisoners and sell it in our catalog. Arnold is the senior pastor of the Bruderhof, a group of 2500 people in seven different communities who really attempt to live according to the teachings of Christ. Seeking Peace, with a preface by Buddhist teacher Thich Nhat Hanh, is both deeply Christian, and universally spiritual. Following are two brief chapters from Seeking Peace:]

The Peace of God

True peace is not merely a lofty cause that can be taken up and pursued with good intentions. Nor is it something to be simply had or bought. Peace demands struggle. It is found by taking up the fundamental battles of life: life versus death, good versus evil, truth versus falsehood.

Yes, it is a gift, but it is also the result of the most intense striving. In fact, several verses in the Psalms imply that it is in the process of striving for peace that peace is found. Such peace is a consequence of confronting and overcoming conflict, not avoiding it. And rooted as it is in righteousness, genuine peace — the peace of God — disrupts false relationships, disturbs wrongful systems, and debunks the lies that promise a false peace. It uproots the seeds of unpeace.

God's peace does not automatically include inner tranquility, the absence of conflict, or other, worldly estimations of peace. As we can see from the life of Christ, it was precisely by his rejection of the world and its peace that his perfect peace was established. And this peace was rooted in his acceptance of the most harrowing self-sacrifice imaginable: death on a cross.

Many of us who call ourselves Christians today have forgotten this, if not willfully blinded ourselves to it. We want peace, but we want it on our own terms. We want an easy peace. Yet peace cannot come quickly or easily if it is to have any genuine staying power. It cannot merely mean psychological well-being or equilibrium, a pleasant feeling that is here today and gone tomorrow. The peace of God is more than a state of consciousness. Dorothy Sayers writes:

I believe it to be a great mistake to present Christianity as something charming and popular with no offense in it... We cannot blink at the fact that gentle Jesus meek and mild was so stiff in his opinions and so inflammatory in his language that he was thrown out of the church, stoned, hunted from place to place, and finally gibbeted as a firebrand and a public danger. Whatever his peace was, it was not the peace of an amiable indifference.

Here I should point out that despite my own faith in Christ, and despite the vocabulary of this book, I do not believe that one must necessarily be a Christian to find the peace of Jesus. True, we cannot ignore Jesus' statements: "He who does not gather with me, scatters" and "He who is not for me is against me." Yet what does it mean to be "for" Jesus? Doesn't he make it clear that it is not religious words or other expressions of piety that matter? He looks for deeds of compassion and mercy — for love. And he says that even a cup of water to a thirsty person will be rewarded "in the kingdom of heaven."

Jesus is a person, not a concept or an article of theology, and his truth embraces far more than our limited minds can comprehend. In any case, millions of Buddhists, Muslims, Jews — and agnostics and atheists — practice the love Jesus commands us to live out with more conviction than many so-called Christians. And it is hardly our place to say whether or not they possess his peace.

The Peace That Passes Understanding

Some readers might find it fruitful if I went on here to examine various understandings of peace, and to discuss whether it is a way, or a state of being. Others might wish to know just what I mean when I say people are seeking peace. Are they looking for closeness with others, or hungering to be themselves? Are they yearning for trust and love, for something more to look forward to than a retirement? Something else entirely? What is peace, in a nutshell? A thought from one of my grandfather's books has been helpful to me. He writes about a threefold peace: the inner peace of the soul with God; the fulfillment of non-violence through peaceful relationships with others; and the establishment of a just and peaceful social order.

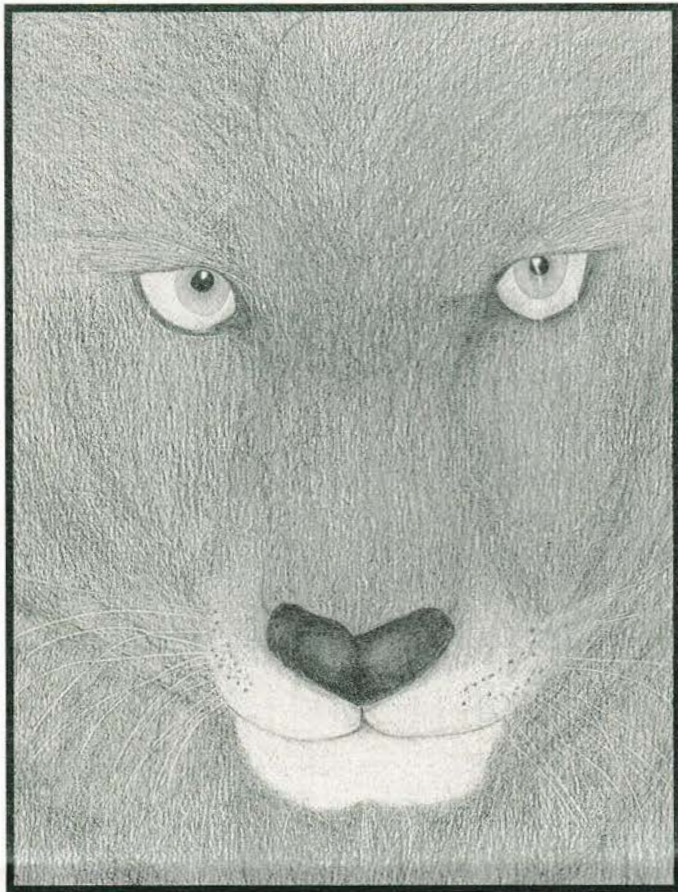
In the end, though, the best definition does not matter, for it may not help us to find peace. To grasp the meaning of peace, we must experience it as a practical reality, not only as something in the head, or even in the heart, but in our day-to-day lives.

Sadhu Sundar Singh, a Christian Indian mystic who lived at the turn of the century, writes:

The secret and reality of a blissful life in God cannot be understood without receiving, living, and experiencing it. If we try to understand it only with the intellect, we will find our efforts useless.

A scientist had a bird in his hand. He saw that it had life and, wanting to find out in what part of the bird's body its life lay, he began dissecting the bird. The result was that the very life he was in search of disappeared. Those who try to understand the mysteries of the inner life intellectually will meet with similar failure. The life they are looking for will vanish in the analysis. As water is restless until it has reached its level, so the soul has no peace until it rests in God.

GOOD WORKS



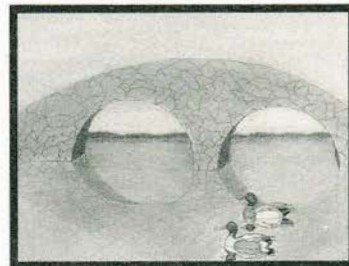
Death Row Inmate Finds Way to Make Restitution

Michael Fullwood is on death row in North Carolina for the 1985 murder of his girlfriend. At the time, Michael and his girlfriend had an infant daughter, Michelle.

Years later, on death row, Michael asked a pen pal, Betsy Wolfenden, if she would help him get prints made of his drawings. She said she would help, but asked him what his "dream" for his artwork was. Michael paused, and then responded by saying, "I want to make restitution."



Today with help from Betsy and other folks, his dream has become a reality. A scholarship account was set up with a local bank, Betsy solicited donations from school to get the project started, and six months later they had enough money for the first order of cards.



The proceeds from all sales support Michelle's education.

A box of eight different note cards (some of which are shown here) with envelopes costs \$10 plus an additional \$1.50 for shipping and handling. Orders for these cards can be placed by calling 1-888-625-LOVE.

Oregon Inmates Find Way to Help Youths in the Community

Los Hermanos ("The Brothers") Youth Crime Prevention and Education Program is a nonprofit organization created in 1993 by members of the Oregon State Penitentiary Chicano Culture Club. Los Hermanos' goal is to help reduce juvenile crime, youth gang violence and substance abuse. They work with youth who have a history or who have been identified as being at risk of engaging in such behaviors. Los Hermanos is *not* a "scared straight" program; instead, they seek to facilitate an awareness of the choices youth have and some of the various consequences that may flow from those choices. Their motto is "Reaching Out From Within," because that is exactly what they do.

Los Hermanos is presently putting together a compendium of prisoner writings on each of the nine Los Hermanos topics. The writings will be made available to the youth and the community volunteers who work with them. If you are a present or former prisoner who would like to share your experiences and/or insights on one or more of the topics please write the address below for more information. Essays, poems, short stories or other writings on the topic(s) of your choice are also welcome. Non-prisoners may contribute to the compendium as well.

For detailed information on Los Hermanos or if you would like to join them in "Reaching Out From Within," write to:

Activities Section/Los Hermanos
c/o S. Zelinka, Staff Advisor
Oregon State Penitentiary
2605 State Street
Salem, OR 97310

If you are incarcerated, please indicate whether or not your facility allows you to receive mail from other prisoners.

NEWS, NOTES, AND OFFERINGS

SPANISH NEWSLETTER BOOKLET

We have translated many of the main articles from *A Little Good News* into Spanish and compiled them into a booklet called *Una Vida Sagrada* (A Sacred Life). If you have already received Spanish newsletters from us, you will receive *Una Vida Sagrada* automatically; no need to write.

INCARCERATION ISSUES ON TELEVISION

For the past four years, Deep Dish TV has focused on the issues of justice and incarceration. They have provided important information to viewers across the country about political prisoners and the growth of the prison industrial complex. For more information, contact them at:

Deep Dish TV
339 Lafayette St
New York, NY 10012

Email: deepdish@igc.org

Website: <http://www.igc.apc.org/deepdish>

UPDATE ON OUR NEW INTERFAITH ORDER



The InterFaith Order of Communion and Community was created in May, 1998, and already has 61 members and 175 novices. About two-thirds are prisoners, and the others come from all walks of life.

The purpose of the Order is to provide a clear and helpful structure for spiritual awakening. Novices and members take several vows which include giving up smoking, drinking, drugs, lying, and pornography. They also abide by requirements which include at least one hour per day of spiritual practice, plus an active involvement in some sort of service to others.

The person on our staff who has taken most of the responsibility for managing the InterFaith Order is Micheal Nicastro (photo above), who spent twenty-three years in prison for robbery and murder. With the help of Bo's books and other spiritual influences, Micheal turned his life around by creating a lifestyle for himself in prison which was very similar to the vows and requirements of our InterFaith Order.

Micheal has become a highly-valued member of our staff and intends to make our organization his life's work. He is engaged to be married this summer. We asked Micheal to select some brief excerpts from some of our novices' and members' letters so you can get a flavor of our newest project.



"The despair has been almost constant. And day after day with no mail visits or phone calls is almost more than I can bear. The Order and my practices are what's holding me together."—S

"The practices and Micheal's comments help me to see myself more clearly."—J

"One thing I've realized from being in the Order is that I'm not just doing this for myself, but others are now able to rely on me as well. I feel as if I'm a part of a family now."—N

"I've definitely made my life into one hell of a mess. I have no doubt that the path being introduced by the Order is the correct one. I'm glad that there are people like you around because for some, like myself, hope is a rare find. Through the Order you've certainly provided that for me."—C

"Having a structure in my life and someone to be accountable to has helped me to deepen my awareness of God and make rapid changes in my life."—B

"This has been a growth process for me — one that is never ending (thank God!). I've given myself a break and began to search inward to validate my existence rather than relate externally to everything and everybody."—B

NEW BOOKS

Below is an easy way to order the new books. As usual, the books are for sale to "free-worlders" and free to prisoners or others who genuinely can't afford them, though you are always welcome to make a donation for the books. Since we will be receiving thousands of responses, please be kind to our small staff, and refrain from writing a letter or making other requests with this form (also, allow for up to two months delivery time). Thanks!

Prisoners or Prison Staff

Be sure to get prior approval if you need it, or send us the necessary mailing slip if required.
Please be certain of your institution's requirements — otherwise we waste a lot of money in return postage. *If you're not going to be at your present institution for at least 2 months, please wait until after you've moved to write for the books.*

☐ Use my address on the back or ☐ Change my address to:

Be sure to include your number if you have one!

Please send me the free book(s):

☐ *Deep & Simple* by Bo Lozoff

☐ *Seeking Peace* by Johann Christoph Arnold

Others – To order one or both new books:

☐ Use my address on the back or ☐ Change my address to:

Deep & Simple _____ x \$10 = _____
by Bo Lozoff (code BDS)

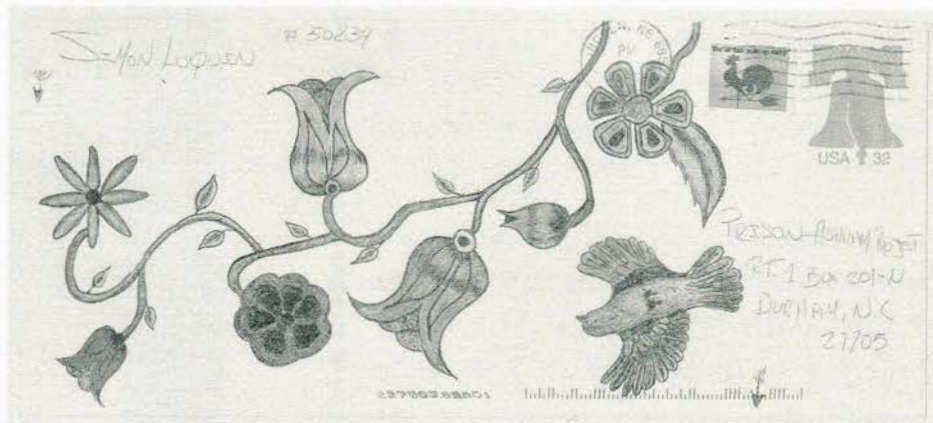
Seeking Peace by Johann Christoph Arnold
Paperback (code BSP) _____ x \$10 = _____

shipping & handling _____ +\$4.00

tax-deductible donation _____

Total Enclosed (check, cash, or money order) _____

✂ Cut here and send in completed form to our address on the back.



a little good news

is a publication of Human Kindness Foundation, which is non-profit and tax-exempt under section 501(c)(3) of the IRS code. Donations and bequests are welcomed and are tax-deductible to the full extent of the law. All money goes directly to support HKF's work, helping us to continue producing and distributing free materials to prisoners and others, and sponsoring Bo Lozoff's free lectures and workshops and the other projects of the Foundation.

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I know how unbelievably hard it can be to change our lives in major ways. I know how easy it is to be cynical about trying yet one more round of ideas or practices or vows or new year's resolutions; we've failed so many times....

But on our way toward becoming free of all habitual behavior, it is often necessary to first replace bad habits with good ones. The habit of spiritual practice — especially at the very beginning of each day — can remind us of who we are and what we wish our lives to be about.

— From our new book, *Deep & Simple*, by Bo Lozoff

